

news

# Ellis Dead at 101

Ruth Ellis, known as the oldest out lesbian, died in her sleep last month at her home in Detroit. She was 101.

"I'm just an ordinary little woman," she once told a reporter from the *Boston Globe*. But the 48-inch tall, 83-pound woman known as Ruth by most everyone she encountered led an extraordinary life.

On Sept. 9, Ellis attended a celebration of the opening of Detroit's Ruth Ellis Center for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth. Each February, that city celebrates Ruth Ellis Day as part of Black History Month. And she was the subject of an award-winning documentary by Yvonne Welbon titled "Living With Pride: Ruth Ellis at 100."

Bev Youree of Richford, VT knew the diminutive black woman through their

mutual involvement in Golden Threads, an organization set up to connect older lesbians to one another.

Youree said she'll always remember meeting Ellis. "Here was this tiny black 96-year-old woman telling us about the job she had in the retirement home where she lived."

Ellis, it seemed, went door to door within the high rise building getting her neighbors' shopping lists. She would then head out to the store to procure the needed items for "the old folks" as she called them.

"She was easily 20 years older than most of the people she was running errands for!" said Youree. "She lived her life as she saw fit; she was an inspiration to all of us."

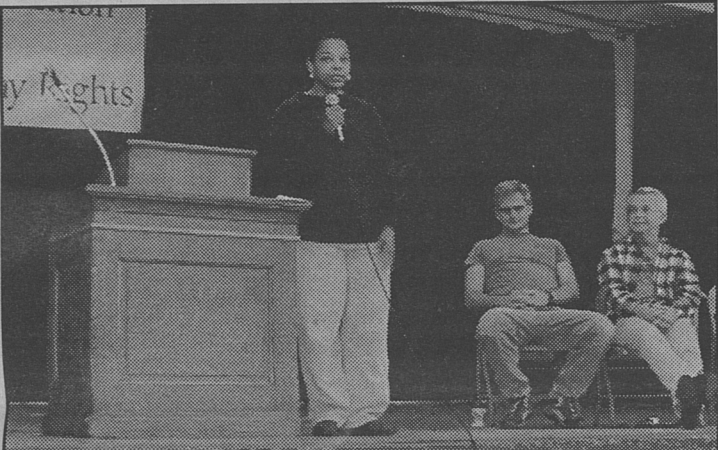


Photo: Barbara Dozetos

Jan Dunlap (standing) was among the speakers featured on the Generations Panel at the VCLGR Annual Conference on Oct. 21. Vincent Downing and Tim Palmer (l to r seated) also spoke.



In anticipation of World AIDS Day on Dec. 1, this issue of *OITM* focuses on HIV & AIDS issues. Look for articles on page 5, 8, 9, 12, 23 and facts throughout.

# Commission: Few Bumps in CU Implementation

BY BARBARA DOZETOS

MONTPELIER—Despite the political turmoil stirred up by the passage of Vermont's legal recognition of same-sex couples, Act 91 seems to have caused little trouble for its administrative agencies.

The committee overseeing the law's implementation convened for the first time on Oct. 4 for testimony from several state agencies. While the Banking, Insurance, Securities, and Health Care Administration is still working to meet the Jan. 1, 2001, effective date for its portion of the act, the Department of Health and the Secretary of State reported few problems and little additional work for employees.

According to Bill Apao, director of health statistics for the Department of Health, beyond the challenge of getting the system up and running in less than three months, there has been little increase in workload and minimal cost for his agency.

As of Sept. 30, 769 certified civil unions were reported to Apao's office. Two-thirds of those couples are female, and the median age of individuals joined in civil union is 40. This compares to 31 as the median age for couples getting married

in the state.

Seventy-five percent of civil unions certified by Sept. 30 were for couples living outside Vermont. People from 46 states, the District of Columbia, Canada, and seven other countries have traveled to the state for civil unions, in spite of the likelihood that their new status will not be recognized when they return home.

New York residents represent 101 of the unions certified to date, second only to Vermonters. They are followed in number by couples from Massachusetts (63), California (50), and Florida (42). Only Mississippi, Montana, North Dakota, and Wyoming are not represented so far.

It is too early in the process, said Apao, to tell whether these statistics will be characteristic of civil unions in general. "After the law has been in effect for a couple of years," he said, "we'll have a better idea of what typical is."

Only anecdotal information, said Apao, is available regarding longevity of relationships prior to obtaining civil unions.

Rep. Bill Lippert, D-Hinesburg, appointed by the Speaker of the House to the commission, said his experience indicated that most couples entering civil unions in the early stages of its availability are those in established long-

term committed relationships. "They are accessing civil unions," he said, "to acquire the legal benefits now available to them."

Brattleboro town clerk Annette Cappy, appointed to the panel by Governor Howard Dean, agreed. She said her office has issued approximately 180 civil union licenses. "If I had to guess," she said, "I'd say the average length of a relationship so far is 20 years."

Secretary of State Deborah Markowitz told commissioners that her office received many questions before Act 91 took effect, particularly from town clerks and justices of the peace, but that subsided after a series of training workshops.

"With the exception of a small handful, most [clerks] saw it as just paperwork," Markowitz testified. "I find this remarkable, considering most of them had little or no personal experience with gays and lesbians prior to this." She said her office has received no reports of any town clerks refusing to issue licenses to couples who request them. "By and large," she said, "they are doing their duty."

Commission member Harvey Golubock, chair of the Vermont Human Rights Commission, also testified before the group about

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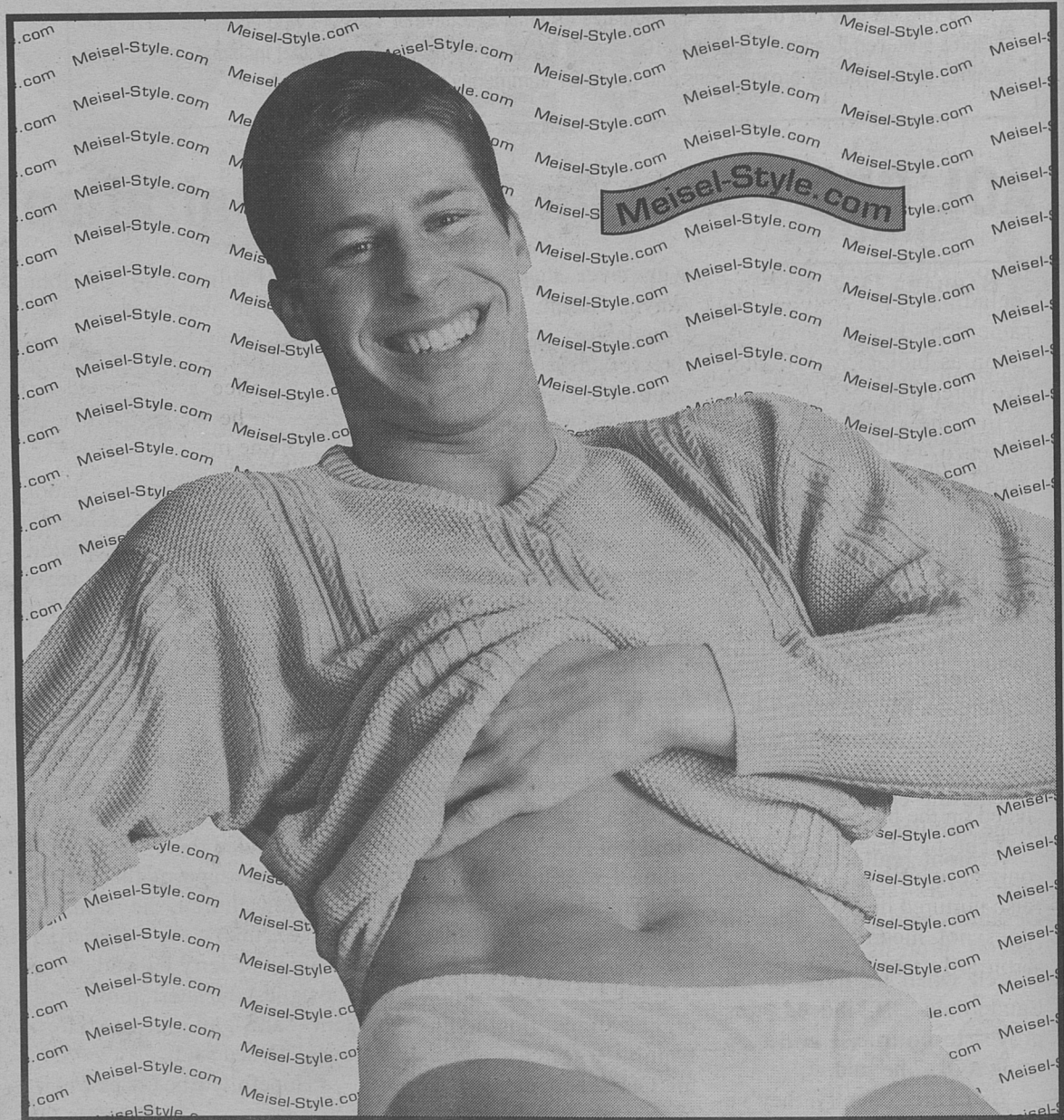
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